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ABSTRACT

The way that mothers' input assists children with the use of their linguistic resources for negotiating peer interaction was studied. Two two-year-old girls and their mothers were videotaped once a month for eight months while the foursome met at a weekly playgroup. The mothers' language was analyzed in terms of the following questions: (1) Does the input to the children relate to their potential or actual involvement in a joint activity? (2) Do they suggest that one child invite or join the other? (3) What do they say during the course of an established joint activity that threatens to fall apart? (4) When the children do not pick up on the first cues from the input, what modifications do the mothers make in reiterating their suggestions? (5) Given that the mothers intervene to support the joint activity, do they withdraw and steer the peers to each other, and if so, how? The mothers were found to make explicit the means for and advantages of soliciting and acknowledging cooperation. This was particularly obvious in the breakdown of the input as a function of child familiarity with the activity. The mothers stressed establishing shared frames to permit mutual comprehension. It also was found that mothers' input can serve to teach their children how to respect the more open-ended discourse demands of joint peer activity, when to ask, when to tell, and how to converse about what they were doing. Therefore, the input can be seen as a socialization vehicle for helping the child learn to use her existing formal resources to mediate social interaction. (SW)

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"IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR FRIEND?": MOTHERS' INPUT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROLE-APPROPRIATE DISCOURSE AMONG PEERS

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"Is that any way to talk to your friend?": Mothers' input and the development of role-appropriate discourse among peers

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In this study, we have examined how mothers' input assists children with the use of their linguistic ressources for negotiating peer interaction. We are looking at the mothers' input as a 'scaffold', as a support system finely tuned to the children's ability to meet the discourse demands of the situation at hand. Thus, we are using a metaphor which others have proposed characterizes the child's development of various other interactional skills (Budwig, Strage, and Bamberg, 1981; Cazden, 1980; Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Our usage of this metaphor reflects a model of language acquisition that couches language in its social context: language is a complex rule-governed system used to mediate and enrich social interaction. We do not suggest that formal structure can emerge from communicative pressures or a combination of semantic and pragmatic factors alone (although, we would not deny that the language faculty is engaged only when the child has something to communicate, as Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan (1976) have proposed). Rather, we are focussing on how the mothers' input can guide the children to use what linguistic ressources they have to initiate, join or maintain a joint activity with a peer. To date, as we shall return to in the discussion, much research that proposes such a scaffold has done so in the context of a two-party situation, involving the mother and the child. We have examined this support mechanism as it is used in a 3- or 4-party situation, involving the mother(s) and two children.

To this end, we have analyzed the mothers' input in terms of the following questions: Does the input to the children relate to their potential or actual involvement in a joint activity? Do they suggest one child invite or join the other? What do they say during the course of an established joint activity that threatens to fall apart? To the degree that each partner must assume a particular role in an activity because of the relative familiarity of the participants with that activity, do the mothers indicate this, and if so, how? When the children do not pick up on the first cues from the input, what modifications do the mothers make in reiterating their suggestions? And finally, given that the mothers intervene to support the joint activity, do they withdraw and steer the peers to each other, and if so, how?

The Study

We videotaped two 2 year-old girls and their mothers once a month for 8 months while the foursome met at their weekly playgroup, which had already been going on for several months. Each taped session lasted approximately 2 hours, and took place in alternating homes. At the beginning of our study, the children were 2;3 and 2;6, respectively; at the last taping session, they were 2;9 and 3;1, respectively. Videotaping began when the children first started talking to each other while they played together. During prior visits, the children talked to the adults and played together, but they rarely talked to each other.

When the visiting dyad arrived, we turned on the camera and filmed whatever went on. The aspect of the data analyzed here consist of the mothers' input to the children while they engaged --or tried to engage-- in two types of joint activity: "Equal Familiarity" and "Unequal Familiarity". "Equal Familiarity" activities were those where the two children were on equal footing. Both had had ample experience with the activity at hand, such as playdough, a favorite activity, which they played with every time the playgroup met. The second type of activity, "Unequal Familiarity" activities, were those where one child (the 'Expert') was already familiar with that activity , but the other child (the 'Novice') was not. To ensure that we would have such activities on tape at each session, we had brought a project to one mother-child dyad earlier in the week, and asked that mother to rehearse it with her child some time before the next session. For example. one such project involved decorating little 'people' and a make-shift school-bus with dots and stars. This type of activity was included to yield situations where one child would have the advantage in steering the activity, and the talk about it, because she alone was familiar with it. The children provided us with other "Unequal Familiarity" activities when they spontaneously introduced new toys and storybooks which the other child had never seen before. We examined how the input reflected the mothers' knowledge of the children's relative familiarity with the activity at hand, by how they prompted leading or joining the activity in role-appropriate fashion, i.e., respecting the background knowledge that each participant brought to the interaction.

Analysis of the Input

We flagged each instance of mother input according to what was going on at the time, and who the utterance was addressed to. Then, we categorized the utterances aimed at promoting joint activity.

Table 1
Classification scheme for mothers' input as a function of addressee involvement in and familiarity with activity.

	Equal Familiarity	Unequal Familiarity	
		Addressee=Expert	Addressee=Novice
Initiate (A↓)B			
Join (A)↓B			
Maintain (A/B)↓			

A=Child A; B=Child B; ○=engaged in activity; ↓=addressee

Each utterance was coded for whether the addressee was involved in the focussed-on activity or not. This is indicated in the 3 rows in Table 1. If Child A was engaged in the activity but Child B was not, input to Child A was coded as Initiate, and input to Child B was coded as Join. If both children

were engaged in a joint activity, input to either child was coded as Maintain. Each utterance was further coded for whether it occurred during an "Equal" or "Unequal Familiarity" activity. This is indicated by the columns in Table 1. We further subdivided the "Unequal Familiarity" column according to whether the addressee was the 'Expert' or the 'Novice'. We then looked at the mothers' input under each of the resultant 9 circumstances.

Results

The first 3 questions in the introduction asked whether the input would reflect the degree of involvement of the addressee in the focussed on activity.

Table 2
Content of the input as a function of addressee involvement in the activity.

Initiate:	Mothers suggest that: 1) A show B what A is doing 2) A offer B participation, or instruction in how to participate 3) B might help A in the activity, especially when B=Expert
Join:	Mothers suggest that: 1) B should look at A's activity 2) B join A's activity 3) A could help B with the activity 4) B could ask A how to participate, especially when B=Novice
Maintain:	Mothers' suggestions to increase cooperation: 1) recognize activity as joint -show the other what you've made/done -look at what the other has made/done 2) be aware of the other's assets -ask them how -solicit their ressources 3) be aware of the other's needs -show them how -include them -share ressources with them 4) acknowledge the other's help/sharing/compromising Mothers' suggestions to preserve joint focus: 1) don't abandon the activity or the other child 2) apoligize for transgressions that threaten the survival of a joint activity

Input to Child A while she was engaged in the activity but while Child B was not (Initiate) consisted of 3 types of suggestions: 1) That Child A show Child B her activity ("Show Jan what you're making with your playdough."); 2) That Child A offer participation or instructions in how to participate to Child B

("You wanna tell Jan how you do this?"); 3) That Child B might help Child A in the activity, especially when Child B was the 'Expert' ("Susan, maybe Jan could help you put the blocks in the tub.").

Input to Child B while she was not engaged in the activity but Child A was (Join) consisted of 4 types of suggestions: 1) That Child B should look at Child A's activity ("Look what Susan's making!"); 2) That Child B join Child A's activity ("Wanna do the art project with Jan?"); 3) That Child A could use some help with the activity ("Wanna help Susan put the blocks in the tub?"); and 4) That Child B could ask Child A how to participate, especially when Child B was the 'Novice' ("Ask Susan how she's making her potato-man.").

Input while both children were engaged in the same activity (Maintain) consisted of suggestions for how to increase or preserve the joint focus. These suggestions can be broken down into more specific categories: To increase joint focus, mothers suggested:1) That the child recognize the activity as joint ("Show Susan what you just made with your playdough."); 2) That the children be aware of each other's assets and ask the other how to proceed ("Ask Susan where the pieces go.") or solicit their ressources ("Ask Susan for the blue pen."); 3) That the children be aware of each other's needs and show the other how ("Show Jan how you do that."), include the other ("Let Jan do some too."), and share limited ressources with the other ("Let Susan use the pen too."); and 4) That the children acknowledge each other's help/sharing/compromise ("Say Thank-you."). To preserve joint focus, mothers suggested:1)That the child not abandon the activity/other child (Jan starts to walk away from the play table, announcing that she is going outside, and her mother says "What's Susan going to do then?") ; 2)That the child apologize for transgressions that threaten the survival of a joint activity (Jan has splashed Susan while they were taking turns dropping toys in a tub, and Susan turns to her mother, crying; Jan's mother says "Jan, you better say you're sorry!").

How did input to the 'Expert' differ from input to the 'Novice'?

Table 3
Content of the input as a function of child's familiarity with the activity ('Expert' vs. 'Novice' status)

Addressee:	
Expert:	Mothers suggest: 1) Expert show Novice how 2) Expert tell Novice how 3) Expert not abandon Novice mid-stream 4) Novice needs information and assistance
Novice:	Mothers suggest: 1) Novice watch Expert 2) Novice ask Expert how 3) Novice solicit Expert's cooperation 4) Expert knows how, so she can be appealed to for help/information

The mothers prompted the 'Expert' to do 4 things: 1) To show the other child how ("Jan, show Susan how that goes."); 2) To tell the other child how ("Tell Susan where the pieces go."); 3) Not to abandon the 'Novice' partner mid-stream ("Jan, Susan won't be able to do it if you leave."); and 4) To recognize that the 'Novice' needed information and assistance ("Susan, Jan needs you to show her how.").

The mothers prompted the 'Novice' to do 3 things: 1) To watch the other child ("Jan, look at how Susan's doing it."); 2)To ask the 'Expert' how to participate ("Jan, ask her how."); and 3) To solicit the other child's cooperation or assistance ("Why don't you ask Susan to help you?").

They explained to the 'Expert' that the 'Novice' could be expected to require information and assistance from her. And they made explicit for the children why the 'Expert' could be appealed to: only she knew how, only she could explain how, which typically, she did not do unsolicited.

Thus, the mothers highlighted the necessity of shared knowledge for fruitful cooperation in a joint activity, and how to go about sharing that knowledge. They never asked the 'Novice' to explain an activity with which she was not familiar. Further support for this comes from comparing what the children were prompted to say to preserve the joint focus during the two types of activity. The mothers often urged saying "Thank you" to acknowledge cooperation during the "Equal Familiarity" activities, where the children already shared the knowledge necessary to engage in that activity jointly. But there were no instances of socialization of politeness conventions during the "Unequal Familiarity" activities. In these situations, the mothers were capitalizing on an opportunity to draw attention to role demands. Attention to such niceties as 'Please' and 'Thank you' seemed secondary to making sure that the children could manage getting and remaining jointly engaged in the same activity. It was more critical to concentrate on establishing a base of shared knowledge in these uneven situations.

This answers the first series of questions about whether and how the mothers' input reflects discourse demands at various junctures of a joint activity imposed by the relative amount of knowledge the participants bring to their cooperative venture. What about reiterations when their first cues go unacknowledged?

We found a tendency to modify reiterations in 2 ways. The mothers were able to simplify their input until the child understood what was role-appropriate,

1) (Jan has just splashed Susan; Susan runs to her mother, crying.)
   M_J: Look what you did.
   You got her all wet.
   You better tell her you're sorry.
   Jan, you gonna tell her you're sorry?
   (Jan apologizes.)

J=Jan; S=Susan: M_J=Jan's mother; M_S=Susan's mother

or else they resorted to a 2-party exchange

2) (Jan's mother is trying to get Jan to join Susan in glueing.)
   M_J: Susan, show Jan how to use it, how to get the glue out.
   S : (ignores Jan's mother.)
   M_J: OK?
   S : (ignores Jan's mother.)
   M_J: How do you get the glue out, Susan?

The final 2 questions asked whether the mothers ever removed themselves from the mediator position. Whenever a child ran into a problem, she typically appealed to an adult. In such cases, the appealed-to mother often redirected the child's queery to the other child who knew how to proceed, rather than answer the question herself.

3) (Jan, Susan, and Susan's mother are making potato-men.)
J : (to M_S) How does this one go?
M_S: Ask Susan, Jan, she knows, so she can tell you.
J : (asks Susan)

These are clear examples of the mothers making explicit what each child is able and expected to contribute to a conversation about an on-going activity. They also show how the mothers gently reduce their own role as a support system. Generally, whenever a child had been redirected, if she needed more information later on during that activity, she appealed directly to her peer.

Discussion

There was no a priori reason why the mothers should have stressed cooperation. They could have supported solitary play, or they could have left the children alone in their attempts to engage each other in a joint activity. But instead, they made explicit the means for and advantages of soliciting and acknowledging cooperation. They made explicit what each child could be expected to add in talking about a given activity. This was particularly obvious in the breakdown of the input as a function of child familiarity with the activity. The mothers stressed establishing shared frames to permit mutual comprehension.

Where do these findings fit in with other work on the development of communicative competence? Several other investigators have found that input contains the mechanism for language socialization. Snow (1977) has discussed the scaffolding of conversational turn-taking between mothers and their 1-year olds. At this point, the children were being taught the skeleton structure of conversations. Schieffelin (1979) has described how Kaluli mothers use the ElEma routine to teach their children to converse: they make them repeat after them appropriate contributions in dyadic and tryadic interactional situations. These mothers typically prompted verbalizing appropriate affective responses to a third party's actions or words (threat, shame, etc.). Our mothers also urged repairing transgressions that threatened the future of a joint activity, by calling attention to the emotional state of the partner ("You made her cry."). But their interventions generally did not make use of explicit imitation. Miller (1979) has discussed the use of direct instructional language to teach children what to say when (e.g., story book routines). Michaels and Cook-Gumperz (1979) have studied classroom sharing-time exercises, where teachers 'scaffold' the children's construction of narratives. And finally, Gleason and Weintraub (1975) have examined how mothers teach their children when and how to engage in routines such as when to say 'Please', 'Thank you', and even 'Trick or Treat'. What we have shown here is that mothers' input can also serve to teach their children how to respect the more open-ended discourse demands of joint peer activity, when to ask, when to tell, how to converse about what they were doing.

And as for the product , the skills to be learned, that is learning to respect the discourse demands on a partner in a joint activity, our focus on mothers' input dovetails with research investigating children's awareness of role-appropriate language, such as the work being done by Ervin-Tripp and her collaborators. Their on-going research suggests that by age 5, children are already quite sophisticated about appropriate language usage in particular communicative situations. For example, they are quite skilled at aggravating or mitigating requests as a function of listener, situation, and object of the request (Carrell, n.d.; Ervin-Tripp, 1979; Ervin-Tripp, in press; Ervin-Tripp, O'Connor and Rosenberg, in preparation; Gordon, Budwig, Strage, and Carrell, 1980). Our study of input to younger subjects may constitute a first step in understanding where this sophistication comes from.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we hope to have shown that looking at input from this language-socialization perspective opens up new questions for further research.

To recontextualize this study with respect to previous research on input, the first studies focussed on its syntactic and semantic properties to answer questions about the emergence of formal competence. The prevailing view at the time was that Motherese was a teaching language, designed to facilitate the learning of language structure (Drach, Kobashigawa, Pfuderer and Slobin, 1968, e.g.). But the results from such studies showed that it violated a number of basic principles of a structure-teaching language (Brown, 1977). So a second wave of researchers suggested that the characteristic properties of motherese were brought about by a higher-order motivation to accommodate, and communicate with a relatively unsophisticated conversational partner. They questioned the assumption that input served to teach per se (e.g., Newport, 1976; Ervin-Tripp, 1977).

We hope to have demonstrated that input can serve to teach something: it can be seen as a socialization vehicle, for helping the child learn to use her existing formal ressources to mediate social interaction. In this way, input contributes by aiding and abetting the child to use what Slobin (n.d.) has called Operating Principle: Pragmatics, which states that the child should "seek linguistic means for managing interactions with others".

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